DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 159 CS 511 987

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TITLE	Communication Departments in (Pro) Action: A Case Study of an On-Campus Mini-Conference To Address Concerns about the Quality, Centrality and Viability of the Communication Major.
PUB DATE	2002-11-22
NOTE	18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (88th, New Orleans, LA, November 21-24, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Case Studies; *Departments; Higher Education; Journalism; *Majors (Students); *Mass Media; Public Relations; *Speech Communication; Theater Arts
IDENTIFIERS	National Communication Association

ABSTRACT

The National Communication Association's Assessment Packet identified divisions between and among sub-fields of communication as threatening the viability of departments on many campuses and possibly even the integrity of the discipline. In 2000 James Applegate advocated in "Spectra" the importance of unity for developing a strong departmental presence on individual campuses. A February 2002 thread of CRTNET listserv returned to the recurring conversation, debating what kinds of jobs are available to communication majors. While these problems represent some widespread challenges to communication departments, a case study explored how one department dealt with these and other threats upon their campus through a one morning mini-conference. The department's Communication Arts major allowed students a concentration in public relations, theater, journalism, communication studies, or media communications. This particular college had experienced a drop in campus enrollment, and retention data indicated that students were not persisting at a level that was institutionally desirable. This paper discusses the planning for the mini-conference, its workings or seminar sessions, and the educational goals which were outlined at the mini-conference. The paper also states that, since student feedback found the mini-conference to be useful, a second mini-conference was conducted. It notes that several additional sessions were added based on the assessment of the first mini-conference. A conference program is attached. (NKA)

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ED 477 159

Communication Departments in (Pro) Action: A Case Study of an On-Campus Mini-Conference to Address Concerns About the Quality, Centrality and Viability of the Communication Major.

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At the National Communication Association
2002 Conference in New Orleans, LA,
Friday, November 22, 9:30-10:45 a.m.

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CS 511 987

INTRODUCTION:

In April of 2001 The Chronicle of Higher Education devoted a special issue to the enrollment, retention and funding for institutions of higher education. NCA's Assessment Packet identified divisions between and among sub-fields of Communication as threatening the viability of departments on many campuses and possibly even the integrity of the discipline. In 2000, James Applegate advocated in Spectra the importance of unity for developing a strong departmental presence on individual campuses. A February 2002 thread of CRTNET returned to the recurring conversation, debating what kinds of jobs are available to Communication majors. All of these problems present some threat to the quality, centrality, and viability of Communication departments. While these problems represent some widespread challenges to Communication departments, the following case study explores how one department dealt with these and other threats upon their campus through a one morning mini-conference.

THE PROBLEM

In the fall of 2000 some of these larger problems became more apparent and strenuous in the light of some campus-specific issues. Campus enrollment dropped, and retention data indicated that students were not persisting at a level that was institutionally desirable. Given that the institution is fairly tuition driven in terms of its financial stability, these trends had significant financial ramifications for the whole college. Even more particularly the student senate voiced concerns surrounding student advising and professional preparation. The Provost made a public plea to faculty to address the concerns of the Student Senate at a departmental level. In the same speech he asked faculty to find ways to reduce expenditures and he suggested that departments create value-added dimensions to their students'experiences that did not create significant additional cost.

Our own communication department had recently undergone several substantial changes in the preceding years. A new curriculum had just been adopted; bringing us to a total of five concentration areas within the major. Although the number of students in the major and the enrollment in classes indicated that the Communication Department was one of the healthiest on campus, the rate and number of changes as well as the increasing diversity (and thus potentially, fragmentation) among our concentrations within the department contributed to the potential for an identity crisis within the Communication Major. Within the Communication Arts major are concentrations in PR, Theater, Journalism, Communication Studies, and Media Communication. It is the third largest major on campus,, and students are actively involved in departmental and campus leadership activities. However, we also heard from students considerable concern about issues of professional preparation and related areas.

OUR SOLUTION

In response to these exigencies, we devised a plan for developing a Communication Arts Department Mini-Conference, an annual, half-day series of seminars dedicated to developing long-term goals and strategies for student success. We chose a Friday midway through spring semester, and required the conference as a mandatory component of every Communication Arts course. Treating the mini-conference under the campus policy for class excursions or trips, we excused all registered students for their classes from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m..

The explicit goals that we used to develop the mini-conference included:

1. Assist students in developing long-term goals.
2. Assist students in developing strategies for college success.
3. Provide clear professional preparation tools and skills.
4. Address difficulties from the advising process.
5. Increase student retention.
6. Add low-cost, high-impact value added dimension to major.
7. Assist students in articulating the viability of their major.
8. Provide resources for student success within college career.
9. Provide resources and strategies for accomplishing long term goals.

After extensive brainstorming, we selected nine sessions (described below) to offer during the mini-conference. Each of the six faculty members was responsible for the content of one session and collaborated with another faculty member to develop the content for a second session. Students pre-registered for sessions and we adjusted the size of the room and the number of repeated sessions based on student interest. Each session was forty-five minutes in length, and during each of the three session times, students could chose between four or five options. Attendance sheets circulated during each session.

We publicized the mini-conference primarily in Communication classes, but also sent one mailing to all Communication majors. Each faculty member described the conference on the first day of class during the semester, referring to the requirement in the syllabus. Two weeks prior to the event, faculty members distributed a conference brochure describing the content and schedule of the conference and containing a pre-registration form. Publicity drew on our Wizard of Oz theme – of "Finding Your Yellow Brick Road." Students returned the pre-registration forms to the communication office by hand or through campus mail.

Administrative staff, faculty and student administrative workers designed individualized folders for each student, including their schedule, pertinent handouts, note-taking paper and announcement sheets.

We chose a campus building with a large conference room adjacent to multiple classrooms and a large lobby to house the event. As students picked up individualized registration packets, they enjoyed orange juice, coffee and muffins. We opened the mini-conference with a large session for everyone in attendance. More than 130 students attended. During the first session, we explained our "Finding Your Yellow Brick Road"

theme through a student/faculty dramatic interaction with DVD clips from the Wizard of Oz. We also talked students through the schedule.

The sessions we offered included the following topic areas and content.

1. **A panel of area professionals** was assembled "to take your questions regarding interviewing, job searches or selling yourself as the right person for the job" (text from publicity brochure). The editor of the local newspaper and a prominent local P.R. practitioner fielded questions from ninety students in the large conference room. This session had the largest pre-registration interest level, however because of the constraints of our guests' schedules it could only be offered one time. Two faculty members collaborated to bring the panelists for this session.
2. **An overview of the Communication Major** focused on helping students form cogent response to questions from family, friends and employers regarding the purpose and content of their field of study. The conceptual unity of the Communication discipline was outlined, the connections between the divergent concentrations was addressed, and a substantial Q & A time was eagerly filled by students. One faculty member facilitated this session.
3. **Internships, co-operative experiences and study abroad experiences** are a key component of our departmental and college philosophy. This session prepared students for some of the logistical hurdles to participating in these programs, and focused on motivating them toward supplementing their formal education with one or more of these options. One faculty member facilitated this session.
4. **Navigating general education, core requirements and concentration choices** was a particular concern of our faculty because of our recent changes to curriculum as well as the campus-wide concerns regarding advising. This session used several carefully designed handouts to help students spatially conceptualize the long-term challenges of matriculating through the major and general education. Students were encouraged to develop a "map" of their entire college experience during this session. One faculty member facilitated this session.
5. **Discussion method teaching** is a pedagogical tool common across the concentrations in the major. Yet often we find that students (particularly first and second year students) don't know how to make the transition from a straight lecture oriented teaching style, to a more collaborative classroom environment. This workshop outlined assumptions of discussion method teaching and gave students practical ways to take notes, study, and interact in this type of classroom. Students were given handouts and experience in applying the concepts. One faculty member facilitated this session.
6. **Graduate school** is something that some of our students are considering and an option we would like more to investigate. Students were given information and resources in order to respond to the questions of why go? How do I select a school? How do I prepare .. to get in and to do the work once there? Additionally, the session facilitated a discussion of survival strategies and navigating the kinds of differences students would find in graduate school compared to their undergraduate experience. Two faculty facilitated this session.
7. **A session on resume writing** provided students with practical tools for creating a picture of themselves in a resume in a way that would catch the attention of employers and help them to articulate their skills, experience and abilities. The

seminar was very hands on and walked students through the process of building a resume.

8. **Relocating geographically as a part of job transition** is often ignored bymany of our students since the vast majority grew up within the surrounding Midwestern region. This session provided structured handouts and exercises for how to go about researching a new city or place to live along multiple dimensions. One faculty member facilitated this session.
9. **Almost of all of our students receive some form of financial aid**. We're in a recession, it seems that nothing is cheap, and for many students it takes practical and creative measures to continue affording college. This session was designed to help students gain a better understanding of how financial aid "works" and other ideas about how to think about (and obtain) the money that's involved in continuing their education. Two faculty members and a representative of the financial aid office facilitated this session.

After the three session hours, we held a 15 minute wrap-up session in the same conference room. During the wrap-up session, one faculty member talked about how to follow-through with goals set during the conference and offered some motivational words of encouragement. Students filled out a half page open-ended feedback form during the final session. Since there was no attendance form at the final session, student attrition was most noticeable.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSE:

At the close of the conference we solicited student feedback about the helpfulness of the conference as a whole, and of particular seminars. We asked open-ended questions about the value of the conference, repeatability of workshops and suggestions for changes and additions. After synthesizing the responses of students we were able to compare the perceptions of students across year in school and across the concentrations. As expected, certain seminars appealed more to students because of their year. For example, first and second year students more uniquely agreed upon the value of seminars such as "what is our major", "Internships" and Discussion based classes" whereas upper division students found "getting out of town" and "graduate school" more valuable. Interestingly, the seminar on resume development cut across all years as the most helpful.

All seminars were judged to be worthy of repeating and there was a more even distribution of class-rank opinion about these. The highest response to "what should be changed" was "nothing", but we did receive additional feedback that indicated there would be value in extending the length of the sessions, focus more on particular concentrations, include more time for questions, have outside speakers and variety in the breakfast food. Of all these responses the trend that stood out was the need to gear seminars even more toward the concentrations. Suggestions for new seminars were related to career opportunities within the major, interviewing skills, and time management.

We ascertained that the conference program more successfully addressed the long-term issues for our students than short term issues. We returned to our initial objectives for the mini-conference and asked if we needed more or fewer seminars. We also raised the question of how to address the in-college/post-college issues. Since one of the biggest in-college fears of our Communication majors is the nagging sensation that they don't know what's going to happen to them after college, we concluded that by addressing future issues we were also dealing with present concerns.

Two successes of the mini-conference that had not been a part of our explicitly stated goals led to our conscious adoption of them for the second year conference, as well as guiding some of the decisions we made regarding other feedback and impressions we received. It was clear from the feedback that the following two goals (though not articulated by us) had been achieved:

1. Create a sense of community.
2. Encourage students regarding their potential and future.

MINI CONFERENCE - TAKE TWO

Based on the overwhelmingly positive feedback we received from the first mini-conference, we decided to repeat the conference implementing changes based on the feedback we had received. The overall structure of the second conference was the same as the first one had been.

The mini-conference was held in the same building during one morning on a Friday midway through spring semester. We offered eight sessions, opened in one common session, used pre-registration to anticipate attendance, and organized the general theme around a movie (Shrek – "Journey of a Lifetime"). However there were substantial changes that simplified the entire event, reduced the efforts of faculty members, and responded to specific feedback by students. The following changes were direct responses to feedback from students:

1. **The addition of concentration-specific wrap-up sessions.** Partly based on the frustration of students in the three concentrations not represented on the "area professionals panel" in the previous year (Media Studies, Communication Studies & Theater), we decided to end the day with concentration-specific sessions. These sessions featured a person working in the concentration area, and were conducted for an extended time frame that was structured for students to ask questions and a faculty member to facilitate closure.
2. **Helping students prioritize and strategize.** After the first mini-conference, students expressed feeling overwhelmed by the scope and sequence of the resources and ideas provided during seminars. Some students reported that their response to this feeling was paralysis and thus avoidance. We focused concentration sessions on helping students summarize and process the information they had received. In each session, faculty members encouraged

students to identify six valuable principles from the day and then to further narrow those to the two most important and valuable principles. Faculty orally helped students develop action-steps to flow from those principles. Finally students were encouraged to share their goals and principles with at least one other student.

3. **Shorter breaks, more food.** We reduced between session times from 15 minutes to 5 minutes, increasing the number of student – helpers in the hallway to help direct younger students to their sessions. We also increased the drinks available and rationed them out more carefully across the whole morning.
4. **Post-event lunch together.** Many students advocated for more "down time" with faculty, so we acquiesced by invitatingall students to attend a casual lunch in the private dining room on campus. The food provided was simply carried in by students from the cafeteria.

Other changes that we made originated in our own evaluation of the event.

1. **Less preparation by faculty**. We met this objective by repeating many of the sessions from the previous year, but we relied on a student organization, the Office of Career Planning and Placement and more outside speakers.
2. **Class Specific Ratings**. In order to focus our audiences and messages more carefully, the registration brochure rated some sessions as JR/SR for upper division students and FR/SO for lower division students. Three sessions were rated ALL, and these ratings were purely suggestions, not enforced. This step allowed us to focus our sessions more carefully upon the needs of the students at various levels, thereby reducing preparation time for faculty members and misunderstanding by students.
3. **Addition of Concentration-specific guests.** Not only did we process learning in concentration-based pods, but we also focused the third session time period on concentration-specific guests. During our first year of planning, we strategically chose **not** to divide the sessions based on concentrations. Our fear was that the movement toward specialization would further fragment the unity of the major; upon review, we decided that attending to the concentration-specific concerns of students may free them to feel less apt to evaluate other sessions using criteria specific to their concentration.
4. **Fewer repeated sessions.** Because we repeated sessions, offered class specific ratings and combined concentrations for the final session, we only repeated one of the sessions – on resume writing.
5. **More control of guest speakers.** Prior to the first conference, we were concerned that un-moderated speakers may communicate messages that contradict our assumptions and intentions for the day. In order to include more outside speakers, we utilized an interview format for each guest speaker. Each faculty member communicated with each speaker beforehand, clearly articulating our purposes and developing some questions for the interviews.

6. **Addition of guest speakers across concentrations.** Each concentration session included an interview with an area professional working within the area of that concentration.
7. **Student presentations.** A session dealing with study-abroad opportunities was hosted by the Communication Arts Society and the featured speakers included four students who had studied in remote locations including Great Britain, Los Angeles, Kenya, and Australia.
8. **New registration process.** In order to reduce ambiguity regarding student attendance, registration forms for the conference were collected in classes during the week prior to the mini-conference.
9. **Data gathering in smaller sessions.** Response rate was improved because we collected data in the concentration sessions when attrition was less of a problem than in the large non-mandatory session of the previous year.

We added the following sessions based on the assessment of our first mini-conference.

1. **Preparing for successful interviewing.** We invited the campus office of Career Planning and Placement to offer a session on preparing students for interviews. This topic was a direct response to feedback from students from the first mini-conference. Inviting the Career Planning and Placement to provide the seminar was a response to their plea for involvement after the first year's mini-conference success. One faculty member served as the liason for this session.
2. **Personal time management.** This topic was mentioned more than any other in open-ended feedback during the first year's conference. The seminar utilized principles from Stephen Covey's work and Meyers Briggs principles – drawing on the interest areas of one of the two faculty members involved in planning this session.
3. **Concentration sessions.** Each of the five concentrations invited a guest for an interview followed by questions by the students. Guests were asked to describe the nature of their profession, the rewards and the drawbacks of their work, a typical day, challenges facing the profession, barriers in finding a job within the profession, and (based on the religious nature of our institution)their integration of faith within their profession.

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Welcome!!!!

Beyond the bricks of your yellow brick road lies....

Welcome! Beyond the bricks of your yellow brick road lies a place of wonder, excitement, and answers to your questions.
We know these questions range from getting started in your Communication Arts major, finding money and other resources to keep you here, and knowing where to go once you leave here!
This conference addresses these and other key issues through a series of workshops listed below.
You know your interests so select from the various workshops, and start finding your way through your yellow brick road.

Schedule of Events

8:30 - 9:00	Registration and Complimentary Breakfast
9:00 – 9:30	Welcome
9:30 – 10:15	Conference Session I
10:30 – 11:15	Conference Session II
11:30 – 12:15	Conference Session III
12:30 – 12:45	Wrap U p and Closing

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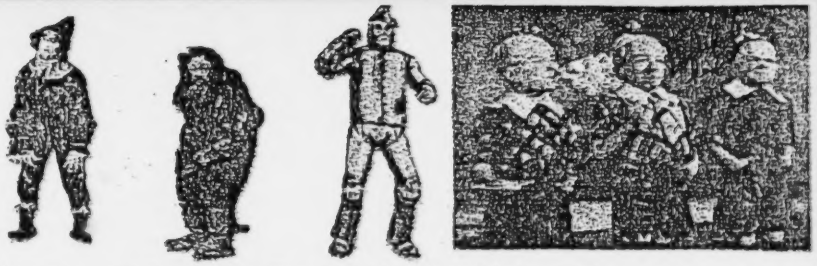
Menu Choices



1. So, Scarecrow, you want a job, huh?
This seminar invites area professionals to take your questions regarding interviewing, job searches and selling yourself as **the right person** for the job. This is a great opportunity to hear from the pros…or your future employer.

2. Communication? So what are you gonna do with that?
Sometimes the diversity of the Communication Major can be confusing. (Theater? Television? Newspaper? PR? Relationships? What is this major about?) Most communication majors know that they enjoy their communication courses, but it's hard to explain to friends and family. This session gives you some clear answers that will satisfy Aunt Bess at the family reunion and give you confidence as you explain.

3. Hands on, but…will it help me get a "real job?"
Hear about internships, co-operative experiences and part-time jobs that truly enhance your chances for employment. Listen as peers relate their stories…both successful and horror!

4. Yes, Dorothy, there is life beyond Malone-land!
What happens after graduation? How do you find the **nerve or the heart** to launch out on your own? This seminar offers advice for moving on after graduation and moving out!

5. If only I had more money!
It takes practical and creative measures to continue affording college. Pick up tips on outside scholarships, part-time jobs and other creative means for financing your education.

6. Can I really say I did that?
Your resume is the first look at your credentials, so how do you "wow 'em" with that first impression? This seminar walks you literally through the process of building your resume. Participants write their actual resume.

7. What do I study? We just talked…
If you haven't already, you soon will find yourself in classes that are primarily discussion based. Why do people teach this way? How do you prepare? How do you take notes – or do you? In other words, this session will deal with practical ideas about how to optimize your learning experience and how you can be successful in this type of learning environment.

8. More school? I never thought the Wizard would say that!
You might have considered graduate school. Then again, maybe not. But, that doesn't mean you shouldn't think about it now. You never know, you might want to go back to school at some point in your future. Now, or later, the questions still are: What is it? Why do people do this to themselves? How do I get there?

9. Gen Ed., major requirements and concentrations…oh my!
What courses do I need to take to earn my Communication Arts degree? Whether you're just getting started, are half-way into your junior year or panicking about fitting it all into your schedule, journey down your yellow brick road…with a map! This session focuses on charting your path through the Communication Arts program.

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Yes! I'm coming to OZ!! ☺

Name_____

Address_____ Box #_____

Phone #_____ Communication Arts Major □ (yes)

Expected Graduation Date_____

Please select (4) of the following seminars to attend.
(Rank them 1-4....1 being your first choice) - **You'll get to go to three**

Please reply by Monday, March 26th to the Comm. Arts Office

____1. So, Scarecrow, you want a job, huh?
____2. Communication? So what are you gonna do with that?
____3. Hands on, but.....will it help me get a "real job?"
____4. Yes, Dorothy, there is life beyond Malone-Land!
____5. If only I had more money!
____6. Can I really say I did that?
____7. What do I study? We just talked....
____8. More school? I never thought the Wizard would say that!
____9. Gen. Ed., major requirements and concentrations....oh my!

Journey of a Lifetime

Communication Conference Spring, 2002

Friday, January 25th

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Write Your Resume

Ever wonder what employers see when they read your resume? How do you look on paper? Find out how to stand out above the crowd by creating a super "picture" of yourself. Come to this session and learn how to capture someone's attention in a resume so you'll get that all important interview. This seminar will walk you through the process of building your resume.

JR/SR
9:25 – 10:10

Time Management:

Who DOESN'T wish they had more hours in a day? Do the hours you have seem to slip away too easily? Are you always trying to catch up because something else took your attention away from your REAL goals? This session will talk about setting goals and managing your time so that you can keep those less urgent and less important things from robbing us of time and completing the important tasks. Join us!

ALL
10:15-11:00

Extend the Malone Experience

One thing you ought to consider while at Malone is spending a semester away from campus as part of a program in another town, another state, or even another country! Come hear from people who have been part of some of these programs, and get additional information about ideas of places you could go, and how to plan to get there.

FR/SO
9:25-10:10

Finding a Job you can Love

A nice idea, but how to get there? There are a number of different kinds of things to think about this before you start perusing the classified section. What are you called to or what might be God's will for you? What are your gifts and motivations? What are you passionate about? This workshop will give you some beginning ways to answer these questions and to explore knowing more about yourself and just what kind of job you WOULD love.

ALL
10:15-11:00

More school?

You might have considered graduate school. Then again, maybe not. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't think about it now because you might find yourself at some point in the future wanting to go back to school. Whether you want to go now, or later, the questions are: What is it? Why do people do this to themselves? Should I go? How do I get there?

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Financial Aid

We're in a recession, it seems that nothing is cheap, and you know that it takes practical and creative measures to continue affording college. Come and get a better understanding about how financial aid "works" as well as other ideas, or ways to think about, the money that's involved in your education.

FR/SO
10:15-11:00

Interviewing

"If you could be any piece of furniture, what would you be and why?" Questions, delivery, it's all about how you can best convey to prospective employers the kind of person you are and why they would want to hire you. Practical advice about interviewing and resources for continuing to work at developing those skills.

JR/SR
10:15-11:00

Concentration Sessions

What happens after graduation? Each concentration will have a guest speaker to talk about career options and a sense of what life is like after graduation. Lots of time for Q&A regarding vocation and life after graduation.

ALL
11:05 – 11:50

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CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

8:30 – 9:00
Registration and complimentary continental breakfast (Silk Auditorium)

9:00 – 9:20
Welcome and Introductory Session (Silk)

9:25 – 10:10
Workshop Session #1

10:15 – 11:00
Workshop Session #2

11:05 – 12:20
Concentration Sessions

12:30 – 12:45
Closing Session (Silk)

1:00
LUNCH: Feel free to bring your lunch to the Dueble Room to continue conversation

Write Your Resume

Ever wonder what employers see when they read your resume? How do you look on paper? Find out how to stand out above the crowd by creating a super "picture" of yourself. Come to this session and learn how to capture someone's attention in a resume so you'll get that all important interview. This seminar will walk you through the process of building your resume.

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ALL
11:05 – 11:50

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Students attending last year's converence **said:**

"The conference was very helpful. Especially since I am a freshman who is still trying to get a clue."

"It was awesome. The whole conference was helpful and informative."

"I really enjoyed learning/hearing from different profs. The variety was great."

"I found this day to be helpful and interesting in learning more about Communication Arts as a major and the future of this major."

"I was so excited about this session — it was extremely helpful, well put together, and a nice way to get to know other Communication Majors. I really appreciated it."

"Bravo...I'm so glad to see how this major is growing. I feel so privileged to have been a part of it. I am so blessed to have learned under such caring, Christian professors. I see the major getting even better ... keep up the good work."

This year's conference will feature many of the sessions that students found helpful, as well as several new sessions students suggested.

The Communication Arts developed the Annual Conference to assist students in setting long term goals, develop strategies for success while in college, and provide more resources for "advising" students. Some other significant benefits of the conference include opportunities for students to get to know one another, staff, and faculty from Communication Arts better.

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Author(s): Marcia Everett, Malone College; Andrew E. Rudd, Malone College	
Corporate Source: Malone College 515 25th Street, Canton, OH, 44709	Publication Date: November 22, 2002

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